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Ethics and the translation of Holocaust lives

Citation for published version:

Davies, P 2017, Ethics and the translation of Holocaust lives. in J Boase-Beier, P Davies, A Hammel & M Winters (eds), *Translating Holocaust Lives*. 1 edn, Bloomsbury Advances in Translation, Bloomsbury-Continuum, London, pp. 23-44. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474250313.ch-002>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.5040/9781474250313.ch-002](https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474250313.ch-002)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Translating Holocaust Lives

Publisher Rights Statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Bloomsbury Academic in Translating Holocaust Lives on 26th January 2017, available online: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/translating-holocaust-lives-9781474250283/>

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Ethics and the Translation of Holocaust Lives

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You get a commission, do your best within the limited time available, hand it in, and then you are accused of having betrayed a whole people...

- overheard at a conference on translating Holocaust writing

1. Introduction

At first glance, it might seem relatively straightforward to locate common ground between two fields of enquiry that work productively with significant ethical questions of fidelity or loyalty. However, when one starts to engage with the slipperiness of these terms, it becomes clear that the traditions of thinking about ethics in Holocaust Studies and Translation Studies often proceed from very different assumptions, even if the language they use is similar. Does this matter? After all, two different disciplines may well approach their objects of study in quite different ways, and the different approaches may simply provide contrasting perspectives on the same question.

It matters because claims to ethical standards lie at the heart of both disciplines' self-understanding; neither has shown any real willingness to reinvent itself as a purely descriptive discipline. Scholars of Holocaust testimony are concerned with questions of

respectfulness towards the person and experiences of the victim-witness, and with sensitivity to how such experiences may be expressed – or not expressed – in language, as well as with the broader political aims of achieving justice, preventing repetition of the genocide, working against Holocaust denial, and ensuring that the voices of victims take centre stage in interpretation and commemoration of the Holocaust.

Translation Studies has moved from a concern with ‘fidelity’ and linguistic equivalence – which are both, at root, ethical positions concerned with the authority and authenticity of the original text – to a much more complex series of concerns, in which the agency and responsibility of the translator are foregrounded: care for the original text and its author are counterbalanced by care for the status of the translator and for the potential effects of a translated text in the target culture. Of course, the translator of a Holocaust testimony will be working with a sense of ethical imperative, though what this means in practice may vary, depending on the nature and purpose of the task. But a translator may read the text differently to the Holocaust scholar, and have a different sense of what works or is necessary or appropriate in the target language and culture.

The key clash here is between two contrasting approaches: one that places value on the voice of the victim above all other possible factors, that often thinks of translation in terms of loss and distance, and which tends to work either with a philosophical ethics drawn from thinkers such as Levinas (1989) or with an ethics of engaged listening drawn from accounts of the therapeutic encounter, as one finds in the work of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, or Dominic LaCapra (Felman/Laub 1992; LaCapra 1994); and another that understands translation as taking place within a network of influences, constraints and obligations towards many different parties, that sees the translator as a creative and engaged agent, draws attention to cultural context and difference, and that does not consider translated texts to be inferior versions of an original.

Both Holocaust Studies and Translation Studies have, in their own ways, engaged with postmodern critiques of normative or universalizing ethics. Levinas's work has provided inspiration for much of the discussion in Holocaust Studies, despite critiques by left-wing thinkers for its neglect of the political specificity of the communication situation (Eagleton 2009:227). Levinas's work offers a congenial set of ideas for thinking about Holocaust testimony, as they place the ethical burden clearly on the reciprocal responsibility of an individual for the 'Other' in a relationship of obligation: "the face-to-face, concrete encounter with a unique human being for whom I am personally and inescapably responsible" (Shankman 2010:15). The encounter involves the radical questioning of one's own position and ego in the face of the Other, the "laying down by the ego of its sovereignty" (Levinas 1989:85).

Such a philosophical position provides a persuasive model for the necessary attitude when faced with a Holocaust testimony, though when discussing written testimony, it tends to downplay the complexity of the activities of writing and reading; imagining reading as an encounter with the Other can be used to short circuit the issue of the textual mediation of testimony. This tendency to wish away the fact of textuality with all it entails has consequences for how we judge translation, as I will show.

The discussion of testimony in Holocaust Studies provides a good example of how critiques of ethical norms can themselves make universalising claims: attempts to define Holocaust testimonies as texts that possess particular unique features requiring radical openness on the part of the reader in the encounter with the witness actually conceal instructions to the readers about how they are to read (see, for example, Eagleton 2004). If a translation is required to emphasize particular features of a text under the influence of a theory of Holocaust witnessing, are we not also dealing with a normative ethics that elides differences between texts and the witnesses who produce

them, ignores cultural difference and the needs of the target readership, and does not acknowledge the concreteness of the translation situation, the author status of the translator, and the translator's conditions of labour?

Nevertheless, it cannot be sufficient to propose for Holocaust testimony a purely situational ethics, as does Anthony Pym for translation more generally: for Pym, ethics is not about applying a universal ethics to a particular group, but “sketching a regional (ie. non-universal) ethics, intended only for a particular set of social activities, and thus self-consciously unable to make grand pronouncements on any wider humanity” (Pym 2012:4) However, a sense of the cultural centrality of the Holocaust – its status as the defining event of a self-critical Western commitment to values of openness and tolerance – has meant that universal ethical questions are rightly at the centre of all discussion of Holocaust testimony, its reading and translation.

A particular issue for translation is the fact that the act of composing a testimony has come to be seen as an ethical act in its own right, over and above any particular documentary value or knowledge that may be gained from the testimony: there is always an “excess of meaning” (“Bedeutungsüberschuss”, Weigel 2000:123) over and above the epistemological categories we use to ask questions of a text. The value of a text is in the individual nuance, and in the way it bears witness to the possibility or impossibility of articulating experience in language.

Scholars have begun to grapple with the consequences for translation of this view of testimony, with much of the work attempting to apply concepts from Holocaust Studies – such as ‘witnessing’ – to the study of translation (for example, Glowacka 2012). Work such as Glowacka's is very useful, but it does not always coincide with the concerns and theoretical positions of Translation Studies. I would suggest that this has a range of potential consequences: it can matter for the way in which texts are translated

and read; for how the history of the translation of testimonies is interpreted; and for how translations, and thus translators, are judged critically by those who have had their work translated as well as by scholars.

When the ethical concerns of Holocaust Studies scholars are applied to the study of translations, the results can sometimes be unsatisfying: particular demands are made of translators – to be engaged in a committed way with the witness while never appropriating the witness's voice, to respect the authenticity of the witness's relation of their experiences, to be explicit about the translation strategies employed – that may clash with other realities of the translation situation, for example the time and money available, the requirements of a publisher or target readership (for example, for 'readability'), or the translator's expert understanding of target culture conditions. Spending time as a translator in intense conversation and exchange with a witness, as well as engaging with the history of scholarship about Holocaust testimony and witnessing, is perhaps an ideal situation, but it is a far cry from the reality for most professional translators.

This, then, is a further area of concern: the critique of translators and translations by scholars who are acting in the name of loyalty to the witness, but who may not feel an ethical concern for the conditions under which translators work, instead underestimating the extent to which the stability, security and time to devote to a project are dependent on a privileged institutional context: a case of mistaking the opportunities of privilege for standards of moral action (what Anthony Pym (2012:3) calls "ethics for translators with alternative means of support")?

Pym here usefully contrasts professional ethics with philosophical ethics, in a way that is of relevance to discussion of the translation of Holocaust testimonies. Most discussion of testimony and translation proceeds from the most significant philosophical

discussions of the issue, taking as its starting point the work of Walter Benjamin (1973), George Steiner (1998), or Levinas, or Primo Levi's thoughts on translation (Alexander 2007): here, concern for the preciousness of the voice of the witness is combined with a theory of untranslatability, and accompanied either by a melancholy awareness of the losses entailed by translation, or accusations of deliberate distortion. In these cases, 'loss' in translation can be compared to the loss of the witness him/herself, and is an object of mourning. Distorted translations that make too many concessions to the target readership can be read as examples of the assimilation of victim cultures to the requirements of the non-victim majority culture, and of the effacement of difference (Seidman 1996).

Such discussion inevitably – and perhaps deliberately – ignores certain fundamental issues connected with translation as a professional activity: the insights of philosophical ethics work with a rather hazy conception of context and agency, and do not consider questions of professional ethics, standards and values, agreed codes of conduct, commercial considerations and career opportunities, etc. One might argue, with some justice, that the questions raised by ethical enquiries into Holocaust testimonies are important enough that some pragmatic issues may need to be set aside, but the method of comparing source and target text, interpreting certain aspects of the difference, and attributing the difference to a translator-figure may miss parts of the process that are ethically relevant.

Pym puts it like this: "If you describe translation as a linguistic process revealed by the abstract comparison of two texts, translators become the product of that comparison, like anonymous but necessary agents" (Pym 2012:135). The 'translator' thus becomes a composite figure eliding all the other agents at work in the translation process; the critic assumes a form of ethical agency that can be interpreted ideologically

and simply, in terms of labels like ‘distortion’ or in terms of theories drawn from Holocaust studies. What this means is that the ‘translator’ of a Holocaust text is the point of interface and exchange between critical disciplines, an abstract mediating figure that allows for concepts to be exchanged, but has little to do with the realities of the translation situation, the translator’s role, or with the concrete individual or individuals at work on the text.

To sum up, one can say that the translator of a Holocaust testimony is working in a field of tension between philosophical ethics and professional ethics; between ethical considerations arising from the encounter between thinking about the Holocaust and postmodernism, and an ethics that sees translators as agents working in concrete sociological conditions, requiring a clear commission and non-exploitative working conditions; between an emphasis on the encounter with otherness, trauma or incomprehensibility and an understanding of translation as a mode of interpretive reading for a specific purpose; between a rejection of totalizing interpretations and a concrete process of analysis and choice in which professional ethics requires target-cultural expertise; between a demand for fidelity to the witness text and an informed understanding of how problematic such a notion is.

2. Situational or Universal?

Even if we restrict our considerations to the translation of written testimonies (which may only represent a fraction of the translation activity that has shaped, and is continuing to shape, our understanding of the Holocaust) it becomes clear that the sheer variety of

texts and translation situations makes it very difficult to generalize about what one should expect of the translator and how one should judge their work.

How, for example, could we find common ground between the following fairly well known examples?

- As the Soviet Army advanced, retaking the territory it had lost during the German invasion, the writers Il'ya Erenburg and Vassiliy Grossman, along with many others, collected testimonies from Soviet Jewish survivors with the aim of publishing them as *The Black Book of Soviet Jewry*; working at great speed, and facing real uncertainty as to whether the Soviet authorities would actually permit publication, testimonies that were given in Yiddish or Ukrainian were translated into Russian, ensuring that the text appears to reflect a monolingual situation.
- In 1958, Elie Wiesel, along with the editor of the French publishing house Éditions de Minuit, Jérôme Lindon, produced a radically rewritten French translation of Wiesel's Yiddish memoir, *...un di velt hot geshvign*, entitled *La Nuit* (Wiesel 1956; 1958). The text, which forms the basis of all further translations, presents a testimony in a startlingly stark style, which has exerted a key influence on definitions of testimony since (far more than the very extensive Yiddish memoir literature that the text originated in). The text was now available to a larger, non-Yiddish speaking audience in a world language, but it also takes a generalizing view of the original's context, which was rooted in a specifically Hassidic cultural, religious and linguistic context. The text is brought nearer to the reader through compromises with French understandings of Jewish religion, rather than the reader being encouraged to step outside his or her own sphere of experience in engaging with the text.

- The first German edition of the diary of Anne Frank (1950), translated by Anneliese Schütz, has been criticized for particular compromises with its target audience by making substitutions that diluted the text's accusatory tone; for example, substituting the word "Nazi" where Frank had "German", and various other things (see Schroth 2014).

These three cases show texts by Jewish victims being translated into international languages for the sake of a new, largely non-Jewish readership: do they all simply entail betrayal on the part of the translator, or assimilation to an ethics that makes a claim to universality while effacing the specificity of the victim? Or might a closer analysis of the specific situation lead us to understand the necessity for the translation strategies *at that moment*? Is comparing the original text with the translation really the only useful way of approaching the ethical questions raised by these texts?

What about translations that excerpt or fragment texts and fillet them for information, as historians and other scholars constantly do, putting them to use in a very different context and for a different purpose to that for which the testimonies were originally given? The scandalized allegations of tendentious translation made against Daniel Jonah Goldhagen for his *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (Goldhagen 1996) show both that this is potentially a problem and that we do not have enough knowledge to make judgments about it beyond flinging accusations (see the discussion in Ball 2008:19-44). Does breaking down a testimony text into quotation-length chunks, whether translated or not, not also falsify it in important ways? There are very many testimonies that go on long and complex journeys through translation and remediation, during which they lose all connection with their original language and context: the name of the witness, usually in the absence of the name of the translator(s), functions as a

shortcut back to the original, allowing us to assume that the layers of mediation are irrelevant.

Are these examples *all* inadmissible, or are they potentially understandable and acceptable given the context, the pressures on the translator, and the purpose for which the translation was made? If the translations show a professional awareness of the target context, for example by taking account of genre expectations, has the original been distorted and the witness betrayed? What happens if the translator notices different things in the text (such as narrative strategies or systems of metaphor) to the scholar of Holocaust writing? Is the only ethically acceptable mode of analysis one that proceeds from current thinking in Holocaust Studies? What criteria do we actually have for differentiating between these cases, beyond simple – and theoretically naïve – comparisons of original and translation that construct a ‘translator’ as scapegoat for a multitude of sins?

A purely situational ethics with a clear understanding of cultural context and difference would seem to be the clearest way forward, but that would mean abandoning many of the fundamental precepts of our thinking about the Holocaust, the witnesses, and the texts that they have produced. One cannot simply break the Holocaust down into situation-dependent fragments and individual moments of cultural exchange. After all, was the concept of the Holocaust as a universal, culture-spanning event not developed precisely because the tendency to concentrate on individual national or group memories actually plays down the enormity of the genocide and effaces the experiences of the victims? The universal concept of the Holocaust has allowed us to see it not just as an assault on Poland, France, or the USSR, or as an appalling escalation of ‘war crimes’, but as something new, as an assault on the Jews *as Jews* and as a universal negation of

supposedly universal values. Abandoning this for a purely situational ethics might threaten the very universal ethical significance of the events themselves.

We are, therefore, left with a dilemma. But I would propose treating it as an opportunity for thought, rather than as an *aporia*. I would propose that critical engagement with ethical questions should consider three distinct areas of investigation: comparative analysis of source and target text in a way that considers critically what it might mean to translate a Holocaust testimony in an ethical manner in a concrete situation; the concrete sociological analysis of the translation situation and the agents involved; and an understanding of how the ‘translator’ and ‘translation’ are interpreted and constructed in theory. In this way, one can avoid unsatisfying critiques of ‘distortion’ in favour of a more complex view of the translation process and the agents involved; and one can engage with the question of what it means for Translation Studies concepts to be used uncritically in Holocaust Studies, and vice versa.

3. Uniqueness and Translation

One should perhaps start with a straight question: assuming that we accept the idea of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, must we also accept the uniqueness of Holocaust testimonies *as texts*? Are Holocaust testimonies so special as texts that a good, professional translation job is not sufficient? Does the translator’s very professionalism, based on training, experience and expert knowledge, perhaps also entail an undesirable distancing, noncommittal ‘objectivity’ or even *déformation professionnelle*, treating the text – and thus, by extension, the witness and his/her experience – as an object of study or just another job? If, as a postmodern ethics might suggest, treating a text as an object

upon which actions are carried out simply perpetuates a subject-object split that defines the object in such a way that it serves the needs of the subject, then the translator fails in his/her ethical duty: there is no radical openness, no risk to the security of the subject in the face of the other, and no genuine sense of encounter. It also shows no awareness of potential power imbalances in the translation situation, in which the victim can be victimized again by having his/her voice ventriloquized by another.

This position relies on a set of assumptions, however, that often remain unspoken. For example, it assumes that reading a text by a witness is an activity comparable to experiencing direct oral testimony. A sense of ethical responsibility should perhaps urge us to treat an autobiographical text by a survivor as in some way a proxy for that individual, but the downgrading of the significance of text and reading, making them a poor substitute for voice and listening, is potentially problematic.

If writing a text as a witness – that is composing or collaborating on the composition of a complex written artifact in a particular context, for a particular audience and under particular conditions – is not seen as an activity in its own right, but as one that stands in for a more valuable activity – giving oral testimony – then the translator's job becomes difficult. The translator is not simply translating the text in front of him/her according to the commission, but is also mediating an encounter with the witness: if the text is transformed into an object that is more than simply a text, then the translator becomes more than a translator, too.

Demands may be made of the translator that he/she works according to a set of ethical procedures that include ensuring that translation strategies are clear and that the voice and positioning of the translator are always explicit: in other words, that the translator does not ventriloquize the witness in such a way that the reader may mistake the translator's voice for the witness's. Through an encounter with a witness text, the

translator becomes him/herself a ‘secondary witness’, in the formulation of Laub and Felman (1992:15), with a responsibility to ensure that a translated text is the site of an act of witnessing.

Such an ethical demand is useful, and has produced some valuable scholarly work, as well as a range of striking translations that attempt to take this kind of ethical stance (Deane-Cox 2013; Degen 2008). Nevertheless, there are a number of hidden assumptions that make such demands problematic. For example, it assumes that translating a written text – a complex, mediated textual artifact in which certain linguistic, structural, narrative, interpretative and representational choices have already been made – is a similar process to eliciting an oral testimony from a witness in an intimate situation. The notion that a written text allows the witness opportunities for reflection, mediation, complexity, narrative shaping, prioritizing, symbolism, analysis of self and situation, and deliberate choice without pressure of time or questioning – in other words, that a written text is a *different mode of testimony of equal value*, rather than a poor substitute for oral testimony in the presence of the witness – is downplayed here. Further, if I am reading a testimony text, I am not enabling an ‘act of witnessing’: however engaging, moving, challenging, horrifying I find the text, what I am doing is *reading about* an act of witnessing that has already taken place, not participating in it. This creates a particularly difficult situation for the translator: what, actually, is he or she translating?

Sharon Deane-Cox has proposed a way forward. Although she suggests that translators are ‘secondary witnesses’ in the sense described by Laub and Felman, she is careful to acknowledge the textuality of a written testimony (in this case, Robert Antelme’s *L’Espèce humaine*), asking that the translators respect the choices made by

writers, listen to their voices, and render their illocutionary intentions as closely as possible:

[T]he translator must resist the displacement (or misplacement) of what the survivor knows and cannot know into his or her own epistemological frames, in order to avoid betraying the illocutionary force and instability of the original testimony on the one hand and to allow the reader some access to destabilizing effects of trauma on the other (Deane-Cox 2013:315).

There is little to disagree with here, except perhaps that the same analysis of the translation could have been performed without the apparatus of secondary witnessing: is *listening to the voice* different from *reading carefully* and thinking about style, coherence, etc., as a good translator always will? One can argue, as Deane-Cox does, for a reading that is ethically inflected from the start, as an appropriate response to a Holocaust testimony, and which therefore prioritizes particular strategic choices at the expense of others: in this case, conveying the ‘destabilising effects of trauma’. This is compelling, but we should be open to the possibility that the translator’s reading may simply be different to the scholar’s, perhaps for bad reasons, but perhaps also for very good and necessary ones.

We should also remember that the claim to locate ‘trauma’ in a testimony is not like the process of medical diagnosis of an individual, but is ultimately a mode of literary analysis that is informed by a set of current (and not universally accepted) theories and tools that borrow their language from psychiatry, and that therefore itself displaces aspects of the survivor’s text into a new epistemological frame. To put it bluntly, there is a risk of employing a contemporary epistemological framework and its associated

reading strategies in order to seek and find trauma in a text whose author may have had very different priorities.

Nevertheless, and despite these caveats, to dismiss the ethical force of the role of the translator as a mediator of an act of witnessing would be to dismiss a vital and productive tradition of thinking about Holocaust testimonies that has important challenges for Translation Studies scholars.

A sense of the uniqueness of the situation when translating a Holocaust testimony, and therefore of the task of the translator, explains why prefaces and commentaries so often emphasize translators' commitment, personal closeness to the witness, or emotional involvement: the translator's professionalism is equated with a distant, non-committed attitude or even simple commercial motivation. But could one not equally argue that a good, professional translation done by an expert with no immediate connection with the witness might be fairer to the text in an all-round way than one done by a close acquaintance?

An interesting recent example is the retranslation into English of Elie Wiesel's *La Nuit* (Wiesel 1958) by his wife Marion Wiesel (Wiesel 2006). The new text is advertised as being translated "in the language and spirit truest to the author's original intent",¹ and the new foreword by Elie Wiesel explains that the new translation is an improvement on the older one as his wife understands his 'voice' better (Wiesel 2006:vii-xv). Certainly, the collaboration between the two has made for a fascinating new text, which restores some of the language of Jewish mysticism that had been lost in the French translation of Wiesel's original Yiddish memoir (Wiesel 1956), but if one asks which translation is more 'faithful' to *La Nuit* then things become more

¹ See <http://images.macmillan.com/folio-assets/readers-guides/9780374500016RG.pdf> [accessed 12.3.2015]

complicated. Comparing the two English translations, one finds that the earlier translation, by Stella Rodway (Rodway 1960), remains closer in style, vocabulary and syntax to the French text, while Marion Wiesel's is in many respects a fresh narration, making claim to authenticity through personal connection and listening to the voice. Which, then, is more 'faithful'?

There are interesting questions to ask here about whether it is possible to reconstruct an original 'intent' some 50 years later, or whether the new translation might not instead be a response to more contemporary concerns (for example, the emphasis on the witness's 'voice' above all else). Creating a new original authorized by Wiesel himself is a different procedure from translating the text in order to give the English-speaking reader an impression of its considerable literary qualities. Both are entirely legitimate responses, but to suggest that the former is better than the latter on the basis of the closeness of the translator to the author demonstrates an unwillingness to engage with the specifics of the translation situations and the different aims of the translators and translation, not to mention changing conceptions of Holocaust testimony and appropriate ways of reading it.

One is left with a number of questions. Is the 'intention' of the witness – assuming that we can reconstruct it at all – more important than the actual text that forms the basis of the translation? What do we do with a poorly written text (after all, for many witnesses this may be the only published text that they ever produce, and most of the theory scholars draw on has been developed in readings of texts with a high degree of literary sophistication)? Does the translation intend to provide a new audience with an impression of the original, or to introduce them to the witness? And to what extent can the translator (or publisher) take an expert view of the reception context of the translation, and formulate the text accordingly?

4. The Location of the Translator

If standard approaches to defining an ethics of translating Holocaust testimonies leave the translator in an impossible position, then it seems to me that we need to find new ways of understanding what translators do and why in undertaking this important work. An ethics that demands the impossible may be attractive for a discussion of the Holocaust that stresses the incommensurability of the Holocaust with modes of representation in language, but it leaves us with little practical or critical understanding of the translator's role and task.

Such an ethics also makes it difficult to acknowledge the manifold achievements of translators in creating, disseminating, preserving, and passing on knowledge about the Holocaust over many years and in many different cultural and political contexts. In my view, any discussion of translation in a Holocaust context that aims to make any universally valid claim needs to acknowledge this achievement and appreciate its consequences, which go much deeper than the rather limited arguments over fidelity to the witness's voice might suggest.

What a translator does, or does not do, is always grounded in a complex, but concrete situation. Translation analysis can attempt to reconstruct this situation using sociological models (see Kershaw 2010; Wolf and Fukari 2007), and one can then begin to make judgments about the conditions under which the translation was made and the options that were open: this is a precondition for making genuinely informed ethical judgments. Contemporary theoretical discourses about Holocaust representation may be part of the discursive background to the translation situation, and may be taken into

account by one or more of the agents involved in the translation process; such discourses may or may not be the most important influence on the translation situation. However, it may be that the situation in which the translation is interpreted (potentially at a later date and by a scholarly audience for whom it was not originally intended) is dominated by discussion of theories of Holocaust representation; this is natural enough, since texts are always interpreted in a new context, but an understanding of translation contexts can help to guard against judgments drawn from simple ST-TT comparisons, and which construct an abstractly understood translator-figure operating in a realm of absolute liberty and responsibility.

There is little work as yet on the study of *translators* of Holocaust testimony, as opposed to *translations*. We therefore have little information about who does it, why, and under what conditions. Some generalisations are possible, however, based on readings of translators' prefaces and other paratextual documents. A significant proportion of translation work has always been carried out within victim groups and through the generations of the families of survivors: the international spread and linguistic diversity of victim communities has meant that interlingual translation has from the very beginning been a vital means of communicating and comparing experiences, forming and challenging interpretations, building group identities, and promoting knowledge and understanding amongst non-victims. Oral and written communication are both vital in this respect. One could therefore hypothesize that the majority of translation work has been done in private and informal contexts, under conditions that it is now difficult to reconstruct many years later: however, such translation activity is still very much a feature of survivor groups today, and there would be important work to do to investigate the translators' self-understanding and conception of their task.

A key borderline along which ethical conceptions are negotiated is that between victims and their representatives, and non-victims: this can occur in acts of testimony intended to inform the ‘world’ about the nature and extent of Nazi crimes, in legal testimony, in testimony texts intended for broad public consumption or for particular contexts (educational, commemorative, etc.). Historians and other scholars regularly translate victim texts that they are using to underscore particular points, thus putting the testimonies to use in a new context and for a new purpose. Translators may act differently, and experience very different working conditions, in these different cases: they may be amateur or professional, working for pay or on a voluntary basis, depending on the situation and on who has commissioned the translation. They may be established literary or historical translators who are commissioned to translate a testimony, translators located through an agency, or translators specializing in Holocaust-related work; they may or may not belong to the specific victim community themselves. There is usually an element of political or ethical commitment to their work, but even where they work on a voluntary basis without the need to earn a living through the work, various kinds of capital are likely to play a role: status within a group and/or raising the profile of a group, reinforcing (or challenging) group identities, recognition of expertise, acknowledgment of ethical commitment, etc.

It remains to be investigated how distinct the motivations of professional and non-professional translators are, and how their motivations might affect the translations they do (if at all). Do these motivations clash with the wishes of publishers, commissioning bodies, and the victims themselves? We can gain some information from prefaces and other commentaries – these are valuable as a source for understanding motivation, but they don’t tell the whole story, and they only help us in cases where the translator has sufficient status to be able to talk about the task. We should also be open to the possibility

that discussion of motivation in paratexts or conversations with translators is in fact often only tenuously connected with the actual outcomes of translation, rendering ethical judgments complicated.

If translators act as (often unacknowledged) mediators not only across linguistic cultures, but also within victim groups and between such groups and broader readerships, then their work often only becomes genuinely visible when something goes wrong. Controversies about translation often arise at the sensitive borderline between victim groups and the broader societies in which they are located. This border is the site of difficult negotiations and conflicts around ethical problems: who has the right to interpret or to judge? What is the relationship between the testimony text and the victim whose experiences it documents: does it stand in for the victim, as well as being a text produced by the victim? What is testimony for, and what is one allowed to do with testimony texts? How is the truth of a text to be understood, and what is most important about it? Is the identity of a victim, in terms of their chosen mode of cultural self-expression, likely to be diluted or distorted when translated for the benefit of a new readership, and are the feelings connected with this related to the status of a particular minority in a particular society?

The difficulty of these issues make it all the more important to identify the precise location of the translator, to reconstruct the translation situation carefully, and to identify the values that influence interpretations of, and reactions to, translations. Simply comparing source and target text and complaining about ‘distortion’ will not do, but neither should one dismiss fears about distortion and misappropriation as simply naive. After all, such fears originate in deeply held beliefs about identity and truth, anxieties about forgetting and the precariousness of victim group identities in modern societies, not to mention the intense emotional investment in texts by individuals who have

suffered greatly. Nevertheless, our aim is, ultimately, to increase knowledge and understanding, and so we should not shy away from coherent and persuasive challenges, even when they are emotionally difficult. However, this means that as scholars we need to reflect on the ethical consequences of our own positions, as well as those of the translators.

5. The Scholar's Loyalties

If we are to discuss the translator's ethics, then a further level of reflection is required, namely on the ethical concerns of the scholar discussing the translation of Holocaust testimony. This is an expanding field of study, with ethical questions at its core, but there may be certain blind spots that are worth considering, in particular as regards the scholar's understanding of the status of the translator.

Translation scholarship has a vital role to play in making visible the contribution of translators to our understanding of the Holocaust, while also working through the problems and issues that translation brings with it: *making visible* is still a key task of the translation scholar working in Holocaust Studies, even if the process of understanding can raise uncomfortable questions about authenticity, mediation, and witnesses' ownership of the expression of their experiences. If the translator is invisible, or uncredited (which still happens occasionally even now in publications of collections of testimonies: for example Lewis 2012), or the effects of translation are excluded from discussion of texts, then our role is clear.

Beyond this, translation scholars tend also to work with a sense of ethical loyalty to the witnesses themselves: through careful reading of translations against originals, they guard against distortions and expose the interests and ideological motivations that affect how testimony texts are translated and read in translation. In other words, scholars can feel they are acting as guardians of the integrity of the witness text, and through that, of the witness him or herself. They often make a case for particular modes of translation that involve political and ethical commitment, making explicit and explaining the translation strategy, and, where possible, spending extended periods of time with living witnesses in order to ensure that the translation corresponds as closely as possible to the wishes and ‘voice’ of the witness in the new language. Other approaches to translation are, by implication, inferior or less respectful, with the translator adopting a posture that effaces the individuality of the witness and potentially puts the experience at the service of a particular agenda or purely commercial considerations.

If, for example, a scholar criticizes a translation in terms of an ethical injunction against effacing or ventriloquizing the Other, then it is surely relevant to ask whether the critique itself constructs the ‘translator’ as an object of study that effaces the complexity and specificity of the situation, elides the translator with the various other agents and interests involved, and functions simply as a focus for the discussion of theoretical questions. Further, a scholar’s view of the nature of the original text – which may be informed by theories drawn from Holocaust Studies, typically working with ideas of trauma, incommunicability or fragmentation – can only ever itself be a partial interpretation that is designed to support a particular theoretical position; the danger here is that the scholar constructs an interpretation of the original that serves to support the critique of the translation, rather than to deepen understanding of the text.

We can ask, bluntly, what we should do if we discover that the translator - as a particular kind of reader, working with different assumptions and perhaps in a different time and/or place - has simply interpreted the text in a different way? I would suggest that, for the scholar, reconstructing that reading and the conditions under which it was made is a more enlightening exercise for studies of Holocaust testimony than simply assessing the translation against our own preferred theoretical approach to testimony.

This issue is compounded by the fact that scholars are far more likely to take an interest in translations of a small and unrepresentative number of well known, complex, challenging and literary testimonies that reflect in a sophisticated way on questions of trauma, language and communication: as scholars trained in Holocaust Studies, we tend to assume the existence of 'trauma' in such texts, and to seek out examples that back up this belief. A translator whose reading of the text is different may attract our criticism. However, reading a text in terms of 'trauma' depends on an array of theoretical positions that reflect recent thinking about the Holocaust: constructing a view of the original based on such preoccupations in order to critique a translation may not be far away from what the translator is accused of doing.

Ethical critiques of translation practice are often compelling and useful, but they do have blind spots, in particular when it comes to the social position and working conditions of the translator, to the complexity of translation processes, and to the variety of agents that are involved. They also tend not to engage with translators' codes of professional ethics or the theory and practice of translation current in the place and time in which the translation was made. Instead, they prefer to work with the philosophical armory of Holocaust Studies, which is held to have a universal relevance. Of course, ethical universals are vital for critiques of practice in context, and a thoroughgoing cultural relativism would be inappropriate for studies of the Holocaust, but an analysis

of the translation of a testimony should at least attempt to reconstruct the understanding of translation, of the Holocaust, and of the nature and purpose of witnessing that the translator and the other agents involved are working with.

A possible response might be to say that the translator should not take on a translation of a testimony in a situation in which he or she does not have time to act as a 'secondary witness'. This is of course always an option, if one has the economic resources to turn down work. But if we think for a moment about how impoverished our stock of translated testimonies would be if such a rule had held since 1945, then raising it to a general principle seems unhelpful. The exception to this is the process of working with a still living witness who wishes to engage with the translation process: here, the preciousness of the witness's presence trumps everything, and time must be found.

As scholars, we should be loyal to translators as well as to the witnesses. It is easy, and perhaps also flattering, to adopt the role of guardian of the original text, and thus of the witness, against ideological distortion and misappropriation. Of course, this is useful and important work, as scholarship must be about unconditional truth seeking or it is worthless; but it must also turn its critique on itself and investigate whether its own concepts and methods do not also perhaps reflect the blind spots of its own privileges.

The translator should not become a scapegoat, but should be understood as a concrete individual identifiable in a particular context and network of relations. I would therefore suggest that studies differentiate clearly between the translator as real-world individual and 'translation' as focus for theoretical discussion in which ideas about meaning, authenticity, witnessing, experience, trauma, and cultural difference are negotiated. Until we know more about the conditions under which Holocaust testimonies

have been, and still are, translated, one should endeavor to keep these fields of enquiry separate.

Understanding the real-world translation situation and the translator's role and conditions of agency within it will itself entail defining and reconstructing the situation using sociological models, and so is by no means a value-neutral or theory-free 'commonsense' exercise. But since this work has not been done, we do not know what the outcomes will be.

6. Conclusion

Ethical considerations are a fundamental part of the discussion of the creation and mediation of knowledge about the Holocaust – a claim to neutrality would in itself be ethically dubious – but we need also to be aware both of the limitations of our understanding and of the dangers of using analytical categories that are unable to deal with the complexity of translation in context. The term 'translation' is currently used in studies of Holocaust writing as an analogy for all manner of things beyond the rendering of an utterance from one language to another: it is used to refer to remediation, transfer between genres, movement of texts from one place to another (by analogy with the 'translation' of relics), and even the process of trying to render (or 'translate') experience into language. These processes are all of defining interest in the study of the Holocaust, but bringing them together under the label 'translation' has real consequences, in that it simplifies the study of interlingual translation as a field in itself, and marginalizes methods drawn from Translation Studies. This may arise from an insistence on the uniqueness of the Holocaust, meaning that the ideas, theories and methods used to

analyse testimony texts must also be unique: approaching testimonies from a purely Translation Studies perspective would imply comparability with other fields of investigation, and thus ultimately be seen to relativize the uniqueness of the Holocaust itself.

These are issues that should be approached with care. We could perhaps begin by acknowledging that reading a testimony text for translation will, to a greater or lesser extent, involve reading it *like any other text to be translated*, for structure, narrative, cultural specificity, tone, register, underlying structures of metaphor, allusion, and many other things. It is a reading directed towards a specific purpose, but it may well be a more comprehensive reading than an analysis that concentrates on the preoccupations of theories arising from Holocaust Studies. By implication, translation shows that testimony texts are *comparable* with other kinds of text: this may be one source of the anxiety about translation, and it is something that we should be circumspect about.

Nevertheless, in order to understand how and why texts have been translated, and how this has contributed to our knowledge about the Holocaust and its consequences, we need to acknowledge the complexity, specificity and autonomy of translation as a skilled practice, and to investigate who the translators have been and the conditions in which they have worked. Neither Translation Studies nor Holocaust Studies can be made into purely descriptive disciplines – there are ethical positions implicated in all description, after all – though description, contextualisation, analysis are still important as we still do not know enough about what happens to Holocaust texts in translation to be able to make absolutely robust ethical judgments, let alone prescriptions.

If the task of scholarship is to work on behalf of the witness and to ensure that we clear a space for the voice to be heard, then we should still proceed with care and

avoid scapegoating translators. The spaces in which voices speak – including our own – is never neutral or value-free, after all. A “principle of maximum awareness of ethical implications” is a useful imperative for all involved in translating testimonies and reading these translations (Jones 2004:725) But there are other tasks ahead, too, most importantly the necessity to make translation visible as a defining element in the production, mediation and interpretation of knowledge about the Holocaust. Alongside that, we need to understand the translators themselves, their motivations and methods, and their understanding of their task, as well as the conditions under which they work. Finally, since the work of documenting the failures of translators has a fair headstart, a good step forward would be to begin documenting their achievements, too.

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